

“A New and Different Shrub”


Looking for a new flowering shrub to try? Loropetalum is quickly becoming popular, and might fill the bill. I saw a few offered at a retail nursery for the first time about four years ago and didn't recognize it. After some research and four years of observation, I have come to appreciate this special plant.


There is apparently no common name. The genus name Loropetalum is derived from two Greek words: *loron*, meaning a thong and *petalon*, meaning a petal. This refers to the strap-shaped petals that are about one inch long. It was introduced from the Khasia Mountains and China in 1889.


Loropetalum is a member of the *Hamamelidaceae* family of plants, which also includes witch-hazel and sweet gum. There is only one species under cultivation and it is *chinense*. It is a spreading, compact shrub that reaches 6 to 8 feet at maturity, with an unusual horizontal branching habit.


The flowering habit is also interesting. Loropetalum produces masses of one inch lacy flowers during the late winter and spring. The original, introduced plants produce white or cream colored blossoms. There is now a pink variety on the market, and could be other colors about which I am not aware.

Other Loropetalum Facts:


 **Light Requirement:** Partial, or high shifting shade. It can also be planted in north- side locations.


 **Soil Requirement:** Fertile, moist but well drained soil similar to any that would grow azaleas and camellias.


 **Habit of Growth:** Compact, with leaves closely spaced on outward - pointing branches.

 **Foliage:** Evergreen, generally light green in color and sometimes changing to bronze.

Leaves are rough to the touch, like witch-hazel.

 **Salt tolerance:** Not tolerant of salt and would probably show damage from even light salt spray.

 **Landscape uses:** Along the foundation and as mass plantings beneath larger shrubs or small trees where sufficient light is present.

 Pests: Spider mites and mineral deficiencies.

Question of the Week: The ends of the branches on my pear trees have turned black and died. What could be causing this?

Answer: A disease known as fire blight. It is so named because the ends of branches suddenly look as if flame from a torch had been applied. This is a bacterial disease that is usually spread from tree to tree during the flowering season by bees and other pollinating insects. It enters the new tender tissue and works its way down the stem causing it to die and turn black or dark brown.

The extent of injury can vary. Sometimes only the tips of branches are affected, while in other trees, several feet of the branches might be killed. Soft pears, such as Bartlett are much more susceptible to fire blight than those varieties that are recommended for Florida conditions.

This disease can also affect apple trees and pyracantha shrubs. It is not normally fatal to the plant, but can weaken it.

There are several cultural practices that can help reduce the incidence of fire blight. First, be conservative with fertilization. If too much is applied, stimulating extra lush growth, more fire blight can be expected. Prune out affected branches and when this is done, make cuts about 3 inches below blackened stems where the tissue looks normal. These diseased parts should be burned or otherwise removed from your property.

Fungicide sprays can sometimes help but generally, they must be applied early in the disease cycle before symptoms are evident. Since infection by fire blight is somewhat weather related and the fact that some pear trees are quite large, spraying is not always feasible.